

January 1, 2012

Michael Machado
Executive Director
Delta Protection Commission
PO Box 530
Walnut Grove, California 95690

Dear Mr. ~~Machado~~ **MIKZ**

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I am writing to express my enthusiastic support for the National Heritage Area Feasibility Study report and its findings. The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta region was the heart of early California. Native people lived there for 10,000 years and developed a sustainable society that is the envy of those concerned about the environment today. Every period of California history since Spanish exploration relied on the Delta for resources, agriculture and transportation. Parallel to the river culture of the Mississippi, the California Delta created its own heritage communities and folk tales, ethnic enclaves and devoted narrators. A trip up and down the San Joaquin and Sacramento Rivers is a trip through every era of California's history.

The NHA Feasibility study focuses attention of five significant themes: changing use of land, reclamation, multiculturalism, agriculture, and water. These themes underscore the interrelationship between nature and human settlements as well as the many ways nature has been the occasion for community cooperation and conflict. If sensitively managed, the California Delta can become a premier location for revealing America's enduring, yet changing, engagement with the environment. This region is special because the engagement has been long (over 10,000 years) and, as man has attempted to make dramatic modifications of nature, nature has responded with events that have forced significant human adaptation. The story of the Delta is of a long dialogue between the forces of nature and the determination of men. While men have invented bridges, tractors, dredge equipment, ships, and crops to tame this environment, nature has responded with flooding, earthquakes, and the rise and fall of native and non-native flora and fauna. The Delta story is a tale with no clear end in sight, but on its conclusion rests the future of California and the American West.

The timing of this initiative is fortuitous. In recent years the systems put in place in the mid-twentieth century for the distribution of water

from the Delta region to the rest of California have proven to be inadequate politically, economically, and environmentally. As the many stakeholders wrangle, there is a growing risk that the heritage of the region will be sacrificed in the compromises among those who fight to control its water. In addition to helping to make assessable an important part of the history of California, a Delta NHA can provide a voice for residents and those committed to cultural and environmental preservation. Too often the Delta region has been dictated to by boardrooms across California and the nation.

Finally, the creation of an NHA provides a vehicle for stimulating a significant economic engine for the region: cultural, agricultural, and environmental tourism. The Delta sits in the middle of a region bounded by such tourist magnets as San Francisco, Napa Valley, Lake Tahoe, Yosemite, and the Monterey Peninsula. The area already has visitors pouring in. The Delta could easily become another "blockbuster" attraction. Yet it has a special story to tell: not only of the rich history of California, but of the way agriculture and the environment have complemented each other, in the past and yet today. For example, the small farm and recreational facilities established in the Delta complement the "eat local" movement firmly established in Northern California.

In sum, then, just as the NHA which was established along the Erie Canal in New York resulted in creating a tourist attraction which rivals the Statue of Liberty in the number of visitors, so a Delta NHA has the promise of creating a destination that would insure that Northern California remains a "go to" place for a new generation interested in sustainability and the production of local food.

I look forward to the next steps in the process of establishing a NHA. The University of the Pacific is the only university physically on the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta as its campus rests along the Calaveras River. Therefore the interest of the University in this venture is real and personal. Further, the development of a National Heritage Area could provide an excellent reservoir of projects and studies in the social sciences and humanities as well as the natural sciences for our students!

Please let me know how I can help further this worthy effort. As you know, the University is currently pursuing grant resources and partnerships to increase the visibility of Delta narratives and to stimulate cultural organizations that currently struggle in Delta communities. I know from personal experience that these organizations and the cultural institutions in Stockton, Lodi, and Sacramento that are cooperating with them would be further

strengthened should a National Heritage Area be created for the Delta.
We look forward to that brighten future!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'RB' or 'Benedetti' in a stylized, cursive script.

Robert Benedetti
Executive Director
Jacoby Center for Public Service and Civic Leadership

cc: Margit Aramburu, Natural Resources Institute